DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 366 064 EA 025 564

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TITLE Changing the Tire on a Moving Bus: Barriers to the Development of Professional Community in a New Teacher-Led School.
INSTITUTION Minnesota Univ., Minneapolis. Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE 17 Dec 93
CONTRACT R117Q00005-9
NOTE 31p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Atlanta, GA, April 12-16, 1993).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Collegiality; Educational Change; Educational Innovation; Faculty Development; Intermediate Grades; Junior High Schools; *Leadership; Middle Schools; *Organizational Change; Organizational Climate; Organizational Communication; *Participative Decision Making; *Professional Development; *Teacher Participation

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the multiple challenges that emerged during the development of professional community in a middle school that attempted to decentralize decision making. Kruse and Louis' (1993) framework of the dimensions of professional community is used to analyze qualitative data collected at Whitehead Magnet School (located in a large metropolitan school district on the West Coast) over a 4-year period. The framework consists of five structural preconditions and six human-resource dimensions. Five overall characteristics of a professional community include: reflective dialogue, deprivatization of practice, a focus on learning, collaboration, and shared values. The structural preconditions of a professional community were in place at Whitehead; however, teachers reported a lack of trust among the staff. Barriers to developing a professional community revolved around contextual, leadership, and structural factors: a lack of widespread, long-lasting district support; lack of open communication of the school vision; and a teacher-leadership structure that did not empower all teachers. Although Whitehead had some success in piloting a nontraditional learning experience for its students, it has yet to develop a professional community. Successful development of a professional community requires a team of teacher leaders with a more participatory philosophy and experience. (LMI)

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Changing the Tire on a Moving Bus: Barriers to the Development of Professional Community in a New Teacher-Led School

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December 17, 1993

Paper originally prepared for presentation at the 1993 Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Atlanta, Georgia. The preparation of this paper was supported, in part, by the Center for the Organization and Restructuring of Schools at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, funded by the U.S. Department of Education, contract #R117Q00005-9. However, the sponsoring institutions are not responsible for the content or opinions expressed in this paper.

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An Innovative Teacher-Led School

The idea of a teacher-run school suggests that the "ultimate power to change is and always has been--in the head, hands and hearts of the educators who work in our schools" (Sirotnik, 1989). The school featured in this case study, Whitehead Magnet School, began with an admirable dream that teachers, with minimal bureaucratic or administrative constraints, would create an innovative school for the future, a school to educate students for a rapidly changing society and prepare them for successful lives in the information age and an age of global interdependence. Based on four years of qualitative data collection, this paper will examine the multiple challenges that emerged in developing professional community in an innovative school that has attempted to decentralize decision-making. The analysis, suggesting only minimal professional community to date, will be followed by a brief discussion of its implications for the changing leadership roles of teachers.

Framing Concepts of Professional Community

A number of authors have noted the power of community to both focus the work of teachers and students on academic goals and to increase the level of effort and commitment of all members of the school community. This association has been empirically demonstrated by Bryck and Driscoll (1988) and Lee et al. (1991). Kanter's (1983) book about innovative organizations stresses how energizing the experience of a workplace community can be in a setting where managers and employees are jointly engaged in problem solving and mobilizing for change (p. 203). In addition, many reform reports have argued that school improvement will not occur without professionalizing the culture of schools (Carnegie Forum, 1986; Educational Commission of the States, 1984; Goodlad, 1984). Since the intention of the unique leadership structure at Whitehead was to "empower" and "professionalize" teachers, the emergence of professional community would seem to be one key indicator of the school's successful development.

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Our description of Whitehead will apply Kruse and Seashore Louis' (1993) empirically-based framework of the dimensions of professional community. They list five structural pre-conditions:

- time
- physical conditions
- interdependence
- communication networks, and
- autonomy

and six dimensions of human resources:

- openness to improvement
- trust and respect
- expertise
- sense of efficacy
- leadership, and
- socialization

that must pre-exist at some level to create an environment that can foster professional community. If these eleven pre-conditions are favorable, they assert, then the attainment of professional community is possible; in their absence, meaningful professional community is unlikely to develop. The five characteristics of professional community they discuss are the following:

- reflective dialogue
- de-privatization of practice
- a focus on student learning
- collaboration/use of others' expertise, and
- shared values.

If we agree that professional community is desirable, then the leadership to plan, implement, and nurture that professional community becomes an essential part of that challenge. Therefore, although we will consider all elements of Kruse and Louis' (1993)

framework, extra attention will be paid to the experimental leadership[1] model used at Whitehead and how that affected professional community.

The Whitehead Experiment

Organizationally, Whitehead Middle School is among the most radically different schools in the United States, with an alternative vision including student-centered curriculum, individualized, project-based education, and the extensive use of cutting-edge technology.[2] Among Whitehead's main experimental features was its leadership model, consisting of a team of teachers (one "head teacher" and three "teacher-leaders") that was responsible for most administrative, curricular, and instructional issues, and a school site council that routinely discussed school matters. The school designers intended to "empower" and "professionalize" teachers at Whitehead through this structure. An operating assumption was that teacher leadership would foster the growth of professional community among Whitehead faculty and staff, as well as with the larger school community.

A team of local consultants designed Whitehead School for a large metropolitan school district on the West coast, applying an educational philosophy that included the following notions: 1) the importance of student and parent choice and involvement in the design of educational programs; 2) the need for individualization of student programs; 3) the need to eliminate conventional forms of assessment in favor of more complex demonstrations

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1 When the word leadership is used in conjunction with schools, people usually think of the one with positional power: most commonly the principal or in the case of Whitehead--the teacher leaders. Although in this case we will be focusing on the teacher leaders' activities, we do not mean to infer that other teachers were not idea champions who promoted changes and wielded influence even when they may not have had the advantages of access to information and contacts that are givens with positional leaders.

2 Certain identifying details about the case have been changed in order to insure the anonymity promised to the school community. We have not, however, altered features critical to the case description or analysis.

of student progress; 4) the incorporation of technology into every aspect of the instructional and learning process; and 5) the need to professionalize the role of the teachers in order to free them to carry out the school agenda. School designers were determined to "break the mold" and create a viable school for the future. Indeed, there was palpable excitement among designers, teachers, parents, students, and the proud community as this model school opened its doors in 1989.

Early in 1991, Whitehead Magnet School moved to a newly-renovated physical facility in the city's downtown area. Most visitors to Whitehead were amazed by the predominance of technology available to students, including a learning systems lab, two personal computer labs, two classrooms equipped with discourse systems, synthesizers in the music room, the latest video equipment, and additional computers in the resource center and several classrooms. Whitehead staff were quick to point out, however, that technology at the school was the means to an end, rather than an end in and of itself. The school was "high tech, high-touch, and high-teach" (I.37.91.K), and teachers worked hard to implement a student-centered curriculum. For each of five terms (approximately nine weeks in length), teachers were responsible for designing new courses based on student interest, both on-site and in community locations such as nearby science and art museums as well as the downtown library.

Whitehead's first set of students spanned grades four through six and numbered 160. In 1992-93, Whitehead served 230 students (50 per cent Anglo, 60 per cent male) in mixed age and ability groups from grades four through eight. In order to promote individualized learning, teachers met with each student and her or his parents/guardians each term to develop personalized growth plans. For example, the school's information specialist described a boy with a real interest in aviation to show how the personal growth plans operated. As a result of his interests, the boy had opportunities

to meet with aviators, and one of the nice things that has come from that is that he is

> also much more interested in mathematics and much better at mathematics because he has a real vested interested in becoming a good mathematician if he is indeed going to become a pilot. (I.13.92.K)

Since its inception, Whitehead had an expanded calendar (ten and one half months) to allow for the twenty days targeted for individualized parent-teacher-student conferences, and for staff development.

The Status of Professional Community at Whitehead

Although Whitehead was justifiably proud of a number of students[3] who had flourished at the school, data suggest that professional community had simply, after four years, not developed among teachers at Whitehead. The problems at Whitehead seem even more acute when compared with the high expectations everyone had for the school. However, if that is the dark cloud, the silver lining is that we can learn a great deal from Whitehead's initial lack of success in developing professional community. In describing the dilemmas experienced by this school, we faced uncomfortable decisions about reporting harsh judgments regarding hardworking people we have come to know and respect. We have tried to be fair in our presentation of the situations and have given the main players an opportunity to give feedback on this paper. Ultimately, our intention is to prevent others from creating similar situations that are damaging for all the staff involved and, as another consequence, less than ideal for students.

According to Kruse and Louis' (1993) framework, Whitehead met most of the structural pre-conditions (time, physical conditions, communication networks, autonomy and interdependence) necessary to foster professional community. Arranging time to meet was

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3 It is interesting to note that the former Whitehead evaluator has talked to teachers this year who were severe critics of Whitehead, but are now teaching Whitehead graduates. The teachers say "that the students are different. They are definitely more technologically literate, but they seem to have more resources at their disposal, they are more independent learners, they seem very calm, and they know where they are going" (N39.93). This is, however, purely anecdotal data at this stage.

not an issue. Since the school day began late (9:00 a.m.), teachers had time for formal, full staff meetings before school once a week. Sub-groups of teachers also met one or more mornings during the week regarding, for example, their subject area, a specific child, or committee work. The leadership team met once a week after school to discuss school-related matters. Twenty extra days were built into the school calendar for additional staff activities (six for conferences, fourteen for staff development). Further, the Whitehead Council, composed of parents, teachers, students and community liaisons, held monthly meetings to implement non-traditional, site-based management. However, while there were opportunities to meet, the time[4] demands of developing new courses without texts every nine weeks and attempting to do authentic assessment for approximately eighty students per teacher were exhausting and contributed to the staff's tendency to favor the immediate demands and ignore the development of professional community.

The physical conditions of the newly-renovated building eliminated physical barriers to communication. Each teacher had an office space or cubicle with her or his own computer, all located near each other in a quiet space. The school also had a teachers' lounge and two nearby conference rooms. Communication networks were unusually good (although communication was poor). Teachers were connected through electronic mail on their own computers, and, as noted, weekly staff meetings were held. The leadership structure, purported to be the antithesis of the traditional hierarchical administrative structure, was intended to be flexible and allow communication across role groups. An external evaluation team provided formative evaluations each year that contained useful feedback regarding Whitehead's dilemmas and possible solutions. The instructional staff had a great deal of autonomy from district regulations and complete autonomy in their classrooms. In

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[4]Time may be looked at in different ways. Although time to meet was more available at Whitehead than in other schools, several people have argued that more time was needed upfront. One of the principals had argued, before the school opened, that Whitehead should close for a year for teacher training just like several successful companies such as Saturn Car Company.

sum, four of the five structural pre-conditions to professional community posited by Kruse and Louis--time, physical conditions, communication networks, and autonomy--were in place at Whitehead. The fifth pre-condition, interdependence, was not formally built into the restructuring plan, and, although teaming was discussed informally, its occurrence in practice was rare. During Whitehead's third year, the principal tried to create some interdependence through diverse membership on school committees, however, there was resistance to that collaboration from some of the teachers.

Although most of the structural pre-conditions were in place, finding evidence of the set of six human resource pre-conditions was more problematic. Two (openness to improvement and expertise) seemed to be present, but not fully. In some instances, teachers were remarkably open to improvement throughout the four years of the study. For example, the teachers seemed very willing to try a new time schedule with students. Yet other suggestions for improvement seemed to arouse defensiveness and avoidance tactics among some teachers, especially the teacher leaders.

The availability of expertise is a second human resource pre-condition. There were certainly many excellent teachers at Whitehead with an abundance of talent and experience, but the data suggest that expertise was not often or easily available to the group. New teachers were given minimal guidance about how to operationalize the philosophy of a school with no textbooks. Paradoxically, other teachers feel they had been discouraged from sharing their expertise regarding the schools' evolution. One teacher described a dedicated and talented general teacher who came to Whitehead

> filled with high hopes and ideas. The message from the lead staff was that 'We welcome ideas, we welcome change, if you've got ideas, let us know.' And what happened after her first day here was a road block when it came to her ideas, and her inventions and her hopes. And the lead staff was a road block the whole year. She was just banging her head (against) these people and they didn't want them [her ideas]. (CR1.92.35)

On the other hand, the same teacher said,

> I sympathize with them [the lead staff]. They began this program from absolutely nothing to what we have now. And then the general teachers who came in--different ones every year at this point--and the lead team they kind of hold on to what they created. They don't want to lose focus of what was in '89, but the general teachers would like to see it a little bit differently. (CR1.92.35)

Expertise was also brought into the school the first two years through organization development consultants who led sessions on educational change and teamwork. Expertise may well be a necessary condition for professional community, but evidence from Whitehead suggests that, unless it can be accessed effectively and collegially, it is not sufficient.

Examination of the four remaining human resource pre-conditions (trust and respect, sense of efficacy, socialization, and leadership) reveals dramatic problems. In all of the interviews we conducted, lack of trust was mentioned uniformly and with a great deal of distress. "The people that have left, almost all of them, have left under duress, under a great deal of stress, stomping their feet as they left---angry, hurt" (I19.93). Although teachers entered Whitehead with a strong sense of efficacy, they often reported leaving feeling somewhat powerless. "I think it [the conflicts] may have permanently scarred some people" (I16.92.6). Without any formal orientation, staff socialization appeared erratic. Teachers who expressed professional development needs were, they reported, often made to feel inadequate. A general teacher recalled,

> Numerous times when teachers were seeking help, they were belittled in a teacher leaders' office. It is truly sad. . . . I had a teacher come to me and say, . . . 'I feel like a little girl whenever I have to go and sit in [a teacher leader's] chair. Like I don't know anything, 'cause [that person] is so degrading and so awful.' (I8.93.8)

An intern teacher expressed a similar sentiment by saying, "The word is that it [Whitehead] is not a healthy place to spend your first year teaching. No support, too many hours, extended schedule, no help or feedback" (M40.92.2). We attribute this lack of trust, as well as the lack of a sense of efficacy and lack of socialization, primarily to leadership difficulties to be discussed in greater detail later.

Although not all the pre-conditions for professional community existed at desired

levels, we analyzed Whitehead using the five characteristics of a professional community. The analysis revealed a significant focus on student learning. As was repeatedly emphasized in interviews with the principals, parents, and the community, all the teachers were highly committed to students and to authentic student learning.

However, only minimal levels of professional community were reflected in the four remaining indicators (reflective dialogue; de-privatization of practice; collaboration/use of others' expertise; and shared values) that also affect student learning. Reflective dialogue took place in sub-groups within the school (e.g., in a group of general teachers who regularly went out for Chinese food on payday and discussed school issues), however, most of those interviewed stated that critical reflection on the school philosophy in school-wide settings received a hostile response. A general teacher told us,

> I felt a couple of times undermined in my request to make some change, by the teacher leaders. I have not felt welcomed, or comfort in my opinions, in my needs to speak up about the way I think things need to be run. Just kind of pushed aside and I am by no means the only one. . . . People don't feel comfortable [expressing their lack of voice] because they are put in their place and that is not a comfortable position to be in. . . . In that meeting we had in the lab, two days of meetings with general teachers . . . almost a battle had to happen for them [the teacher leaders] to recognize the fact that those people wanted, myself wanted, a voice. (I41.92)

The third characteristic of professional community, de-privatization of practice, occurred a small number of times between teachers and interns, but the practices of team-teaching or peer coaching were not promoted. There was a structural vehicle for collaboration and use of expertise, characteristic number four, through whole group and subject area meetings, but the discussions observed indicated that topics in those meetings remained at a relatively superficial level. Finally, it appeared on the surface that Whitehead's staff shared some values because they clearly articulated the same student-centered, process-based instructional philosophy. But the conflict that arose in the implementation phase raised grave questions regarding a lack of a common vision, or a process for creating shared understanding of the vision.

What Were the Barriers to Creating Professional Community?

The most basic problem regarding professional community at Whitehead appeared on the surface to be the teacher leaders' failure to attend to the work life of teachers, and notably their failure to purposefully create a professional community. But the story was more complex than that statement suggests. Some of the problem with professional community were inherent in a fairly turbulent external context, some in the combination of personalities chosen to fill the leadership team positions, and some in the school's structure.

Barriers in the Turbulent Context. From Whitehead's inception difficulties arose immediately and continued to plague the school. Throughout the first three years, at times it seemed that just about everyone was either criticizing Whitehead or applying pressure for change. There was pressure to be the "ideal school of the future," and most people expected too much too soon. The school board had barely voted to establish Whitehead when they started watching with a critical eye to see how the school fared. The local educational community was angered by what they saw as a gross number of financial privileges, and Whitehead became the school other teachers "loved to hate." Several district staff were hostile toward the school for a number of reasons that included the differentiated staffing and budgeting snafus that were covered using district funds. Parents were upset about discipline problems they perceived as poorly handled. Parent representatives on the school council felt they were not being listened to and pressed for responsiveness. "Sometimes I feel like a dachshund nipping at the heels of an elephant," one council member noted.

One newspaper reporter was relentless with any criticism that could be mustered, reportedly because of a personal dislike for the then superintendent. By hurting his "baby," the critiques were intended to attack the superintendent. One issue that the reporter highlighted was falling standardized test scores in some areas. Although traditional assessments were never intended to be a significant part of Whitehead's evaluation process,

this nevertheless gravely disappointed the superintendent. Later it drew pressure for the new superintendent who had come up through district ranks and did not view Whitehead as his personal project. Ironically, there was a prevailing belief among the district office staff that Whitehead was a publicity grabber unlike the other magnet programs that had gone about their work without garnering press coverage.

Initially, the first four staff hired were to be given a year to continue working on the design before the school opened its doors. However, that idea was abandoned for financial reasons and due to parental enthusiasm, and the leadership team had less than six weeks to get everything in order before students arrived. Due to the rush to open, staff development on interpersonal skills as well as on the use of technology and new pedagogical techniques was put aside. The cost of their haste was the successful development of a professional community according to some staff members. One staff member observed,

> I think you need to develop the team, before you develop the school. . . . Teachers by nature are self-employed, and we are not taught how to be sharing, how to delegate, how to take criticism, how to give positive criticism, those kinds of things. I think those are things that if any school wants to do this kind of model where we really try to create a team of teachers, you need to have that team have a chance to create itself. (I13.93.7,12)

There was little time to learn how to use the new state-of-the-art technology and, because the facility remodeling had not been finished, the school shared a site with another program for the first year and a half. All courses had to be prepared from scratch according to the philosophy that includes the refreshing idea of rejecting textbooks and using original sources. In addition, procedures and policies were being re-thought and re-invented. Several interviewees have used the metaphor that the Whitehead staff that year ended up trying to "change the tire on a moving bus." One of the principals described the scope of the task and the problems it created:

> How do you develop a dream --- a vision of this brand-new, throw-out-everything, start-building-from-scratch program and at the same time develop interns, at the same time teach twenty-five kids an hour? You can't really expect all that to happen. In the press of creating the school for students, the leadership team established the

> powerful precedent that immediate student concerns come first and that long-term organizational culture and climate issues came at best a distant or even nonexistent second. (I19.93)

The following years brought additional contextual dilemmas as the number of students grew and grades seventh and eighth were added to the mix. This brought the normal challenges of working with teenagers to the school, as well as questions about how to successfully teach classes containing students from age nine to fourteen.

The district office seemed to be increasingly setting up roadblocks so that the school would fail. They supported an inspiring vision for a school of the future that had little conception of how the vision might be implemented and then gave the staff little time and training in order to realize the dream. They set up a fascinating experiment in teacher management and then asked[5] all the teacher leaders to carry a full teaching load in addition. They allowed the press to "beat up on the school with no response" (I.36.12.93). They assigned a traditional principal to the school during year three when several non-traditional advocates were available. The school was intended to be site-base managed, which had budget, implications but didn't get the official decree for three years. An increasing lack of communication with the district office, after the original project manager was eliminated, angered several district staff members. The word in the central office was that the leadership team felt that no one there could understand or help them because Whitehead was so dramatically different. Regardless of its validity, this perception created a measure of animosity that was not addressed and reduced the district office's sense of community with the school. The district office also felt more distant after the departure of the superintendent who first approved the project.

Outside the immediate community, Whitehead School became famous almost immediately, and the teacher leaders appeared to enjoy their popularity as speakers at

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5 One of the school's founders told us that the head teacher was only to teach half-time, but chose to teach full-time.

conferences and other schools around the country. Those moments in the spotlight, however, may have allowed them to further overlook the mounting problems at home. They got a "false sense that all the answers were in their hands, so they didn't feel they needed to focus on organizational problems" (I.36.12.93.3). Whitehead's fame also brought scores of visitors and researchers to the school, requiring school personnel and student tour guides to manage the flow (Louis & King, 1993) and creating the sense of always being in a fishbowl. As one student told us, "Sometimes I feel like a guinea pig [because there are so many visitors]" (N.92).

Structural barriers in the school. Structurally, the school sought to break the traditional mold, and designers presented the idea of four teacher leaders who would facilitate a site-based managed school. Although the designers were well intentioned, the structure reflected the espoused mission of teacher empowerment only on the surface and not in concrete, practical terms. Designers of this leadership structure also failed to apply the lessons learned from other schools with innovative structures or from the experiences of principals and teachers in non-traditional schools. One principal (I36.93) recounted,

> I believe if you are going to make changes in education, you have to empower teachers. . . . [But] it was taboo to have anyone who was involved in education intricately involved in the design. There was very little principal involvement in the design. . . . No one who had ever been in charge of a school was involved in the design. . . The caution was that if they were involved we will end up with the same old plan. Teachers were called, but few of those ideas were used. . . They never identified what they wanted as outcomes. They just said 'It will be better.'

Though the spirit of the plan was to empower teachers, the structure gave just four teachers decision-making power, year-round contracts, and substantially higher pay. The designers had unwittingly created for Whitehead a hierarchy with more tiers than in most traditional schools (half-time principal[6], head teacher, assistant teacher leaders, general teachers, specialists, paraprofessionals, interns, clerical staff, food workers and janitors). In

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[6]In the first year a half-time principal was added to the design due to the principals' union requests.

retrospect, it appears that little thought was given to how the teacher leaders' layer of the hierarchy would affect power dynamics among teachers and what might facilitate effective working relationships.

> It is not real legitimate to have power over. . . . One of the biggest things that this school is working on, the most radical and the most difficult, is shifting power around. They've said the power doesn't all belong to the administration, it can rest within the teachers to some degree. And they said the power doesn't all reside in the textbook or whoever makes curriculum decisions for a school district, it can rest in the families, it can rest in the student . . . . [But be careful of] the resentment that people have when the power shifts. (I.42.1991)

The leadership team's roles were not well-defined, and their responsibilities and goals became a persistent and heated discussion topic between the teacher leaders and principals, between the teacher leaders and the general teachers, and between the teacher leaders and parent members of the school council. As one teacher told us,

> They're called the leadership team, and they're supposed to lead, but there's a lot of ambiguity as to what they are leading, and why and where. In three years no one's given a clear answer to me, so it's clear as mud to the new staff. (I28.91)

Another staff member added, "They [planners] did not think it [the leadership structure] through. The principal was still held legally responsible for things" (I36.93). The role of the half-time principal was even less developed since it was not part of the initial design, and the individual holding that position, appointed by the central office, changed almost annually.

There was some indication that in spite of the title "leadership team," neither the designers nor the hiring committee ever really communicated their expectation of a broader construct of leadership to the individuals they hired. The reluctance of the leadership team to engage in leadership activities, leadership training, and even discussions about leadership suggested this. "People didn't understand they were there for leadership. . . At least one of the lead teachers said they got the money because they were such great teachers" (I36.93). The others felt they <u>were</u> leaders, but just instructional and curricular leaders who organized schedules, processed the development of a new curriculum for each student each term, modeled excellent instructional practice, and so on.

Failure to develop professional community at Whitehead was also attributed to time factors. In the original structure, the head teacher was supposed to carry a partial teaching load, which would allow time for the administrative and vision-tending duties. The plan was not executed that way. The other teachers felt they would have benefitted from some extra time built into the structure, at least during the start-up phase. Though they were excited about creating whole new curriculums and about finding the pedagogy one should use for citizens of the 21st century, those tasks alone were also overwhelming. Something had to fall by the wayside.

> I think it all goes back to the initial problem of time. We all understood that there were these conflicts and they were impacting on our work, but we also, especially the teachers, had to get 250 evaluations done and had to create new curriculum and really this was down on the back burner all the time. . . . Although having some of this friction on the staff certainly impacts the students, it doesn't impact them as much as if we don't have curriculum for them, if we don't have PGP's [personal growth plans] for them, if we don't have technologies available and know how to use them. So there were always things that seemed to take more immediate priority. It's like I can shuffle through another day being a little bit hostile to X, but I can't shuffle through another day without having something to do in my chemistry class. And so it always was on the back burner. (I13.93.8)

A major problem inherent in the leadership structure, according to one former principal, was that there was no method for the non-renewal of individuals who were not performing well in leadership positions[7]. The initial structure was a barebones outline, and designers paid little attention to defining specific results desired or to the methods of accountability to be used in assessing the leadership structure. Therefore, no one could really be called to task when people perceived that things weren't going well. With virtually no accountability, the teacher leaders were seemingly given their positions for life, apart from the unlikely event that they received truly inferior teaching evaluations or committed some immoral act or crime. Under the initial structure, there was no mechanism to "replace them for not doing the leadership well. Principals can be removed if they are not meeting the needs

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[7] A district staff member disagrees, stating that there was a method for removal, but they failed to use it. For example, the positions were to last three years "by agreement" (I38.93).

of their school. Why shouldn't teachers have the same accountability?" (I36.93).

Unfortunately, the structural concept of a leadership team of teachers, attempted in this turbulent context, seemed to reinforce exclusionary thinking and therefore constrained the development of trust and reflective dialogue--two key elements of a successful professional community. One staff member created a metaphor to express his views on the structure and operations, "I see it [Whitehead] as a Cadillac hauling peanuts: a beautiful opportunity with a wonderful vision, but it isn't being used well or for its intended purpose" (M40.92.2).

Barriers from the Leaders' Styles. There is no doubt that the context as well as the structure created a challenging environment for the teacher leaders, nor is there any doubt that the teacher leaders were dedicated. Principals, parents, and the community repeatedly emphasized that all the teachers were highly committed to students and to authentic student learning. Every interviewee stressed that the leadership team worked extremely long hours during the first years using the know-how they had.

> There is one thing you cannot say about the leadership team and that is they're lazy. They have busted their buns this whole time. Really worked hard, and really put a lot of effort in to this and worked late into the night and early morning and everything. (I13.93.11)

Unfortunately, it was not enough to be a good teacher who worked hard. These teachers' lack of clarity about their responsibilites, their highly private and individualistic personalities, and their lack of leadership skills combined to exacerbate an already overwhelming challenge. These factors resulted in the teacher leaders embracing a highly bureaucratic way of operating with rigid notions of their roles. The bureaucratic style allowed the three teacher leaders to survive their stressful predicament by claiming that certain problems, especially the school climate, did not fall in their domain. One of the teacher leaders explained, "The focus for leadership . . . was on the students and the program and not on the people. And we also really made a conscious decision not to focus on the people. . . . I think that we looked that that would be the role of the building administrator"

(I12.93.5). In their division of responsibilities, some important tasks were overlooked, role boundaries were not well-defined, and there was no system of checks and balances. As a result, teacher leaders would decide they had the power to veto one idea and yet let similar issues fall through the cracks. Needless to say, the school culture that emerged under these conditions was not a model of professional community.

Most of the people we interviewed concluded that the people doing the hiring did not understand what kind of leadership experience and style was essential for the "head teacher" to carry a highly experimental school through its initial years of overwhelming ambiguity and constant retooling.

> The head teacher has to be the person that takes charge of how are people relating, how do we create this team, how do we delegate authority, how do we know who does what. None of that was ever really done. . . . I would also like to say in his defense, that he was also given pretty much a full teaching load originally . . . [and] you need to have some time to be the lead teacher and not be the classroom teacher and he was not given that opportunity. . . . [However] you need to have a clear sense that somebody has the reins of the horse, and you don't really get that here and that is a real problem. (I13.93.8,9,12)

The hiring process did not result in a "team" of people who would complement, challenge and support one another and the other teachers through a difficult innovation process.

> We have a really interesting group of personalities in this program, some of whom are not particularly good at relating to other people. They are just not 'people-people.'. . . And there was never time to really develop the team. (I13.93.7)

Therefore, this leadership team had some claim to be called victims of faulty hiring decisions, set up to fail. The planners felt they realized the importance of hiring such a team, however, "failing to use a psychological entrance test, we had no knowledge the three would be such loners" (I38.93).

The leadership team that was hired, not unlike most teachers, had little experience in leadership or organization development. According to the external evaluator[8], from the

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[8] To maintain the promise of confidentiality we are not able to cite the evaluator's work in our paper. We can only apologize to the evaluator for this and state that we appreciate the work that was done.

beginning "the leadership team was not very communicative with each other or other staff as a whole. The teacher leaders had conflicting values and were unclear how they wanted to develop most of the school's structures, processes, and policies" (I.39.93). There were serious conflicts between the head teacher and the three teacher leaders. Nevertheless, the foursome seemed to assume that this was "their school," since they had been the sole professionals during the first year. When four teachers were added the second year, along with another grade level of students, the conflict escalated. The new teachers felt the leadership team was entrenched in their positions, responded as if threatened when offered suggestions, and closed ranks against them. The teacher leaders, on the other hand, perceived that their endless efforts to create a school from scratch were not being appreciated. One staff member described the situation this way:

> Certain members of the leadership team have problems sharing anything anymore because they don't want to hear this, 'Why didn't you do it that way?' Their knee-jerk reaction is 'You weren't here, how dare you say why didn't I, how dare you criticize?' . . . . And so this barrier has gone up . . . . there is a level of childishness on both sides. (I13.93.6,11)

These teacher leaders also felt uncomfortable with any conceptualizations of themselves as being management. When consultants were brought in, during the first and second years, to diffuse the mounting internal tensions and provide leadership training, the teacher leaders stated they really did not see themselves in leadership positions and were sometimes outwardly hostile to the consultants. They told one of the principals that they saw themselves as curriculum leaders and as working to facilitate site-based management, but absolutely not as having responsibility to supervise or assist other teachers.

> "Some of them [the teacher leaders] said, 'I'm not a leader, I'm just responsible for myself.' I said, 'Then why are you in a leadership position? Why are you being paid to be a leader?'" (I36.92)

A teacher leader (I16.92) explained,

> There isn't any sort of real structured mechanism like a very highly organized site-based management system where if someone were to say, if you wanted to make this decision you talk to this person or this committee. . . I would say that there might be a

certain amount of frustration for a person who might come and expect there to be some sort of formula.

And frustration there was. The anger among general teachers about their lack of voice and influence was extremely high throughout the study. General teachers described how they repeatedly saw their agendas dismissed, ignored, or, most often, postponed until a later date that they felt never arrived. The general teachers and parents felt that decisions were based on what the leadership team wanted to do. Several teachers indicated that in spite of rhetoric to the contrary, the leadership team only asked for teacher inpu[illegible]reate the illusion that they had a chance to contribute" (I.91.K). One interviewee (I.91.K) observed that, "The leadership staff are very bright and good with students, but their success has blinded them to the need for input from others. The concept of shared decision-making persists. . . but it was never practiced." A highly reflective teacher (I28.91.K) noted, "There is no shared decision-making in the school. . . no mechanism for engaging staff in dialogue or sharing problems. Whitehead is not a community of learners for teachers."

Attempts by the general staff to make the climate more friendly during the years were greeted with some disdain, and several of the teacher leader staff stated publicly that they would not socialize with the general staff members. Nearly all of the teachers explained how two of the teacher leaders had created an atmosphere where people were afraid to question anything. One staff member recalled (I8.92), "I have seen competent teachers shamed and reduced to tears for questioning a decision." Eventually the frustration grew to the point that the general teachers either withdrew into their classrooms and tried to suppress their concerns about larger school issues or left Whitehead. According to one teacher,

> Again and again we [the general teachers] think this time we will be discussing real issues, real improvements. But when we get to the meeting, [one of the teacher leaders] says, 'We got together and decided to discuss this instead.' Last week I finally decided to disengage from all the politics, and I have felt a lot less crazy. (I34.93)

The turnover rate of general staff members was astounding. In three years, thirteen general

teachers, about one third of the staff per year, left the school prematurely. Indeed, one of the principals (I19.93) said the school has been a "war zone with casualties" (I19.93).

Covert and overt tensions and conflicts among the leadership team, as well as between the leadership team and the general teachers, eliminated the sense of trust and camaraderie that is critical to the development of community. Additionally, everyone reported that conflict was not dealt with adequately. For example, racial tension arose among two staff during the second year but the conflict was never resolved[9], and it created divisiveness as teachers took sides. One of the teacher leaders (I16.92) revealed the avoidance mindset,

> The second year was a year of intense conflicts, many of which never got resolved. . . . [This year] conflicts that have arisen have been between the Council and the staff. . . . I think what has been happening is the staff has to try and resolve it strategically, and say how can we best modify or in whatever way just get them to get off our backs rather than trying to collegially come up with an answer. (I16.93)

However, one of the principals explained that he felt that avoidance of conflict may have finally been the correct choice at Whitehead.

> Open conflict is okay when you are in a situation where we trust each other. And there is no trust at all here. So open conflict is either war, bloodletting, or it results in people leaving. Or you don't engage in it. It is kind of a win-lose situation. (I19.93)

In their defense, the leadership team was constantly under a great deal of pressure, and most of the people interviewed felt that the teacher leaders, individually and collectively, were either not aware of the damage their behavior was causing, or did not know how they might change it. One of the teacher leaders stated that it was the head teacher's responsibility and not the rest of the team's responsibility to take care of the school climate. One principal surmised that the leadership team became so "shell-shocked" that they had to shut down, no longer realizing how authoritarian they were being or how their style affected others. The sense of the team functioning as a bureaucracy permitted the overwhelmed staff to reject the notion of a collective team of professionals responsible for the good of the entire

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[9] According to one source it was addressed at two organization development sessions.

organization.

Although Whitehead's teacher leaders showed concern for the students' needs and choices, they made the mistake of not paying attention to the needs of their colleagues. They envisioned other teachers as self-sufficient professionals in private practice, with the notion of professional community simply not part of their conceptual framework. When this notion was challenged, they refused to engage in solving a problem that, for them, had no meaning.

In spring of 1992, there were indications at Whitehead that this story might take a positive turn. A budget conflict between the school and the financially strapped district at the close of the third school year galvanized a sense of school unity. The head teacher went on sabbatical, and a new head teacher was chosen from the ranks of general teachers. The district brought in a new principal, and there was a genuine possibility for the new leaders to initiate changes and intentionally create a community of learning. But that possibility was not realized.

The crisis that created a temporary unity among teachers at the end of the third year quickly dissipated as the realities of a continuing lack of trust surfaced in the fall of year four. The new principal, who openly declared he was "traditional" and did not embrace the Whitehead philosophy, had less than half-time hours and seemed to focus on what could be done to change the structure and dynamics for the following year. The new head teacher--the potential hero from the "lower caste" (I.36.93) of general teachers--had to learn about organization development on the job in a tension-filled environment. Although the new head teacher began building some sense of community, she had acclimated to the school culture that avoided conflict and was not ready, nor given support, to bring the problems out in the open. In spite of some measure of increasing communication, socialization and respect among the general teachers, the tensions continued to fester under the surface. The replacement appointment was not warmly welcomed by the other teacher leaders, and no sense of a supportive team with common goals emerged. If that weren't enough to worry

about, the new head teacher also had all of the school's discipline problems dumped in her lap.

> [The new head teacher] is limited to some degree because there is resentment from some leadership team members. She is really being divided between the principal and the teacher leaders. And so we are back into that little game. . . . . She is hampered now by being the head teacher, by having the political conflicts that are going on, by simply not having enough time. (I13.93.12)

Implications for Professional Community in Innovative Schools

There were problems with the execution of this "leadership team experiment," and in an important sense it failed to develop professional community. However, we are not convinced that the notion of teacher-run schools should be abandoned so much as considered more thoughtfully when future attempts are made. Using the gift of hindsight, in this section we will summarize the key problems and the implications that emerged from the data in regard to the development of a professional community in a teacher-led school. As with the barriers, we have organized them into contextual, structural and leadership issues, however, clearly some of these overlap. The structural lessons are perhaps the most interesting since the others have been detailed countless time in other studies.

Contextual Issues. Whitehead demonstrates that schools need district support that is widespread and will endure personnel changes. One of the principals commented, a school "can't be somebody's baby and endure, because things are surpressed" (I36.93).

Teachers are rarely informed about the importance of district politics and do not receive training that pertains to the political lessons and human relation skills needed outside the homefront. In schools run by teacher leaders, this awareness and these skills must be developed. On a highly practical level, Whitehead staff might have taken advantage of the district's resources (on non-traditional evaluation, etc.), which might have led to a sense of partnership with Whitehead. Teacher leaders will also need to learn how to invite parents to be part of a learning community, at the same time they maintain their professional roles and

responsibilities. Handling/working with the press is also an acquired skill that any school in the limelight will have to gain in order to flourish.

The final contextual lesson is basically--haste makes waste. All the players concur that Whitehead's first year may have been drastically different if they had stuck to their plan of starting after a year of planning. Another principal had suggested that they simply shut down after the second year, like several innovative companies have done, and retooled. Fullan's (1993) remarks ring true--"rapidly implemented new structures create confusion, ambiguity, and conflict, ultimately leading to retrenchment" (p. 131).

Leadership Lessons. Deal (1992, p. 1) tells us that in times of uncertainty, when no one is sure about what the right job really is, people turn to leaders for direction, confidence, spirit, hope, and cohesion. The leadership team in this school could not meet those needs. They were faced with a challenge that would have been formidable even to an astute, proven leader, were not experienced enough, and, it appears, did not have the right personal characteristics for this job. The leadership team attempted to manage using a "symbolic" orientation, that is, seeing themselves as prophets and articulating a "shared, almost spiritual[10] quest" (Deal, 1992, p. 4). However, they did not realize the importance of or the way to orchestrate the drama, were overwhelmed with the everyday theater of Whitehead, and alternated between inaction and reverting to an autocratic leadership model that was not in sync with their stated vision nor conducive to the development of professional community.

The experience of Whitehead underscores the importance of hiring teacher leaders who have leadership experience and understand how to facilitate change through teacher and student involvement, i.e., who understand the importance of nurturing a professional community. Since schools are loosely coupled and teachers' external rewards are few, the intrinsic rewards of a professional community--such as reflective dialogue, collaboration on

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[10] In response to our draft, one of the key players characterized it as "far more pragmatic than spiritual. In fact, spiritual is what wasn't there" (I38.93).

ideas, and valuing each other's expertise--can become the motivation that carries teachers through the stormy times when everything does not go precisely as planned. The leaders of innovative, forward-thinking schools are called upon to be, in essence, organizational consultants and futurists. Finding teachers with these rare skills can be challenging given the predominant teacher training and teacher responsibility paths at this time. This leadership team did not have the experience nor style needed to successfully handle the difficult task of creating an innovative school on the fly. Therefore, staff did not experience an environment of mutual concern and respect, and a professional community did not emerge. Staff members at Whitehead, however, were not disillusioned with the concept of teacher leadership, but rather felt that its translation into reality needed work. One of the general teachers (I41.92) who had left Whithead reflected,

> I really feel strongly about the school having a 'lead' staff member--to lead the staff in decision-making processes, and then everybody else working in teams and groups to solve problems, and to research and to know what works and what doesn't work, and work around that--the kind of person who leads them into a decision-making process, in making collective decisions. I'm not really sure that the personalities that are there are personalities that allow people to be interjecting and making positive decisions.

A number of Fullan's (1992) "lessons of change" illuminate areas where Whitehead might have avoided difficulties, had their leadership been more well-informed about creating organizational change. Most notably, they missed the lesson that every person involved must be a change agent. In order to create a successful organizational transformation, the majority of organizational members must be sold on the concept, know that they have an important part to play in its ongoing development and success, and feel that colleagues respect and value each others' contribution to the innovation (Fullan, 1993; Kanter, 1983). Firestone and Bader (1991) point out that influence over decisions increases teachers' ownership of those decisions and commitment to them. "Revolutionary change appears to demand a model of organization in which both leaders and subordinates exercise a great deal of influence"

(Louis, 1992, p. 9).

Questions regarding the vision arise in all schools. However, schools attempting to promote professional community will not only tolerate such questions but build staff discussions into the structure to encourage their further examination. At its rhetorical inception, Whitehead's vision was beautifully wrought. The school intended to prepare students to be lifelong learners and citizens of the twenty-first century; to increase student choice and involvement in the design of their educational programs; and to professionalize the role of the teachers in order to free them to carry out the school agenda. As stated previously, Whitehead wanted to "break the mold" and be the model school for the future. Unfortunately, the leadership team did not fulfill their charge, according to one of the school's founders, of further developing the vision. Therefore, the vision, and especially how the staff was going to realize the vision, was never very clear to most of the teachers or the parents. Additionally, the leadership did not design a method for the vision of school to be discussed and to evolve openly with input from staff and the school council. As a result the school community never achieved a meaningful, common interpretation of the vision, much less a process for on-going improvements in its actualization.

Structural Lessons. In interviews with Whitehead staff, there was some sentiment that a different combination of individuals in the teacher leader roles might have brought teacher empowerment and professional community to life in Whitehead's existing structure. However, the data suggest that Whitehead's structure had created an institutional dilemma. The leadership structure was not sufficiently conceptualized and therefore did not coordinate with Whitehead's espoused mission. It did not enable teacher empowerment for all teachers, interdependence or de-privatization of practice. On the one hand, teachers at the site were empowered to create and run the school of their making; on the other hand, the hierarchical structure that gave the four teacher leaders power, without checks and balances, left other teachers feeling powerless, unable to influence the school's vision or practice except in highly

personal settings. In addition, no systematic method existed for encouraging de-privatization of practice or interdependence between classes and subject areas.

Organizational learning and staff empowerment were neglected by the structure (as well as by the leadership team). Thus the benefits from all the teachers' expertise, enthusiasm, and commitment toward creating a successful, innovative school were not gained. Some staff recommended that professional development be "built-in" to any new school plan, since every school is continuously evolving due to new knowledge, changing times, and the particular blend of individuals engaged in the process. Fullan believes that "new school cultures must evolve in which continuous teacher development and continuous school development go hand in hand" (p. 131). Louis (1992) adds that schools must promote and maintain "organizational learning, without which a paradigm shift cannot take place" (p. 12). As Bolin (1989) notes, administrators

> should never make the mistake of putting teachers together in groups to work out solutions to a problem without taking time to develop appropriate group process skills. A faculty, left alone, will not automatically function in a democratic, cooperative manner. In fact, left alone, it is more likely to become chaotic or divide into factions led by various autocratic members. (p. 90)

In a school like Whitehead, on-going "human relations" development (communication skills, conflict resolution techniques, etc.) is as important for teachers' success as in-service workshops on new curriculum, pedagogy, and technology. In the best of all possible worlds, according to the evaluator, "It would be wonderful for any newly restructured school--even small restructuring is going to affect the staff, kids and parents--to have a built in, well-trained, O.D. person. . . to help the community understand the process of organizational change" (I.39.92).

In sum, starting a new school is an extremely difficult task, and the Whitehead challenge was confounded by some structural and contextual dilemmas, and, it appears, the combination of teacher leaders. Together those components thwarted the creation of professional community at Whitehead. However, the leadership model itself, in spite of its

hierarchical nature, allowed numerous opportunities for encouraging and facilitating Kruse and Louis' (1993) five elements of professional community: reflective dialogue, de-privatization of practice, shared values, a focus on student learning, and collaboration. As it became increasingly clear that the formal and informal structures needed revision, a fact pointed out by an external evaluator, one must assume that the sitting leadership team did not have the background to see its importance, did know how to change the structures, or, perhaps, were simply overwhelmed with everything else going on. The Whitehead story leads us to conclude that a team of teachers with a more participatory leadership philosophy and experience, avoiding some of the contextual and structural mistakes made here, might focus on the process of creating a professional community, and in so doing lead a school toward a dramatically different outcome.

Epilogue

Schools that intend to change their culture must "encompass the values, beliefs, norms, and habits of collaboration and continuous improvement" (Fullan, 1993, p. 131) --- in other words---work to develop professional community. Although Whitehead had some success piloting a non-traditional learning experience, it is clear that Whitehead School has yet to develop a professional community. However, hope springs eternal. The development of professional community at Whitehead may yet come to pass in this restructured school. This school does offer the potential for a community of learning built upon a vision and rhetoric that is inspiring. In the spring of 1993, the principal abolished the leadership team structure, and a new structure was introduced several months later. The original teacher leaders, hardworking yet viewed as dictatorial by the staff, all received involuntary transfers at the end of the school year and thus did not return to the school in the fall. The school plans to continue with the basic instructional philosophy, but hopes that instituting a new leadership structure and recruiting over fifty per cent new teachers will stop the "war" and bring peace

into the lives of teachers. Perhaps this fall teachers will focus on tapping each student's unique potential in an atmosphere of trust and support, and the new leadership can begin laying the groundwork for the creation of a true professional community. Our continuing study will track their progress.

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